

VZCZCXR09621
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHOS #0807/01 1660620
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 150620Z JUN 06
FM AMCONSUL LAGOS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7336
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHUJA/AMEMBASSY ABUJA PRIORITY 7378

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000807

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W
STATE FOR INR/AA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV NI

SUBJECT: ATIKU CAMP THINKS IT HAS MOMENTUM AFTER THIRD TERM LOSS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons (B/D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Sources close to Vice President Atiku believe President Obasanjo's third term loss has strengthened Atiku's presidential chances. They told the Consul General (CG) that numerous politicians, including many People's Democratic Party (PDP) governors who toed the party line supporting the third term, are beating a hasty return to Atiku's camp. Atiku allies in the National Assembly plan impeachment proceedings against Obasanjo in the coming weeks, according to these Atiku insiders. End summary.

Atiku Gaining Steam After 3rd Term Loss

¶2. (C) Atiku confidant and National Assembly member, Usman Bugaje, told the CG that Obasanjo's failed third term weakened the President and strengthened Atiku's chances for the presidency in 2007. He stated that people who had been straddling the fence pending the outcome of the President's third term bid, are now moving into Atiku's camp, including several PDP governors who ostensibly supported the third term because Obasanjo threatened them with corruption charges via the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Bugaje contended that Obasanjo's unsuccessful gambit confirmed Atiku's control of the rank-and-file in the PDP and of PDP members of the National Assembly. Thus, while Obasanjo controlled the Party's national executive, Atiku enjoyed the support of most of the governors and local officials. According to attorney and businessman Saleh Ahmadu, Atiku is also benefiting financially from the post-third term realignment. Governors like Delta State's James Ibori and Edo State's Lucky Igbinedion have pledged to help bankroll Atiku's candidacy as well as his moves to either retake or wreck the PDP.

¶3. (C) Ahmadu stated that Atiku has been talking to former military ruler and presidential candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, and they are close to striking a political deal. This deal will go far to anneal Atiku's electoral base in the North West. Buhari will support Atiku for president while in exchange Atiku will allow Buhari to select a handful of ministers to serve in Atiku's cabinet, Ahmadu maintained. According to Bugaje, former Minister of Defense General Theophilus Danjuma has also been in discussions with Atiku and will likely ally with him. Danjuma's once-friendly relationship with Obasanjo has soured to the point where the two are now political enemies. Danjuma wants to scuttle

Obasanjo's designs and also prevent former head of state Ibrahim Babangida from succeeding Obasanjo. (Note: A Babangida insider told us that Danjuma recently traveled to Babangida's home in Minna to advise Babangida to relinquish any presidential ambitions he might be harboring. End note.)

Governor Duke Surfaces As Possible Atiku VP

¶4. (C) Bugaje told the CG that Atiku is searching for potential Vice Presidential candidates. Cross Rivers State Governor Donald Duke is a strong option. Although from a small state, he is relatively well-liked, carries little political baggage, and has good public persona, he said. Senate President Ken Nnamani and Abia State Governor Orji Kalu are also possible candidates because of their role in defeating Obasanjo's third term plans.

¶5. (C) While Atiku personally prefers Lagos State Governor Bola Tinubu as his choice for VP, this option was problematic. Tinubu is ethnic Yoruba and after eight years of a Yoruba presidency, many will oppose a Yoruba being Nigeria's second citizen. Second, Tinubu is Muslim, and a straight Muslim ticket has its vulnerabilities, Ahmadu said.

Atiku's Strategy-Begin Impeachment Proceedings

¶6. (C) Both Bugaje and Ahmadu stated that Atiku's stratagem is to remain in the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as long as possible. He will try to wrest control of the Party away from Obasanjo, taking the Party momentum in the process. Alternatively, he will do all that is possible to weaken the

LAGOS 00000807 002 OF 002

Party before leaving it, should Obasanjo's machinations preclude Atiku from the nomination. A major component in these Atiku designs is the formation of a rival PDP leadership faction to counter the pro-Obasanjo national executive. Either this faction will defeat Obasanjo's incumbents or they will soon begin to set the PDP against itself prior to exiting the divided, collapsing house. Additionally, the Atiku camp is planning to begin impeachment proceedings against Obasanjo within the next few weeks. Sources told the CG that Atiku's camp would charge Obasanjo with stealing Government's funds to bribe National Assembly members to support the third term campaign. The opposition hopes this move toward impeachment will keep Obasanjo on the defensive and sour his taste for remaining in office one day beyond May 29, 2007.

Comment

¶7. (C) The events of the last few weeks are eerily reminiscent of the lead-up to the 2003 elections. Then, Obasanjo opened with a power play to seek re-election and jettison Atiku from his ticket. Atiku responded by spurring his National Assembly supporters to initiate impeachment proceedings against Obasanjo. On the eve of the 2003 PDP convention, Obasanjo literally begged Atiku for his support in order to secure the nomination and avoid defeat. Quick to forget a favor and elephantine in his remembrance of any slight, Obasanjo, once re-elected, decided to destroy Atiku politically. Obasanjo almost succeeded, but the third term failure provided Atiku a new lease on life. If what our contacts are saying is true, and Atiku is allied with Danjuma, Buhari and nearly a score of governors, he is the politician with the most momentum and assets at this point. Instead of defeating Atiku, Obasanjo would have done the opposite of what he sought and inadvertently done more for Atiku's presidential aspirations than any other person, including Atiku himself. End comment.

BROWNE